Oksana Bulgakowa

Malevich in the movies:

Kisses, sensations, or five paradoxes

ABSTRACT: The contribution examines four topics in Malevich's writings on film: the images of rubbery eroticism that are striking in Malevich's discussion of film; the opposition of dead and alive, attributed to painting and film; the connection of dynamics and perception and disconnection of mimesis and perception and the way how Malevich conceptualized it for film and painting; Malevich's effort to elaborate a new language of description for visual and literary phenomena, to find the language that fixes the transition from visuality to literacy and vice versa.

Keywords: mimesis; abstraction; visual culture; Suprematism; Futurism.

1. Introduction

In 2000, teaching a seminar on Futurism I was asked by my graduate students whether we can try to translate a Futurist prose. Thinking on a possible text I choose Malevich's writings on film that I edited some years ago in Germany. The translation in Troels Andersen's edition of Malevich did not let you feel that these texts are written by a Futurist with a very specific way of articulation, linguistic non-conformity, rupture in logic, neologisms, puns, and verbal associations (Muza, 2002).

But what could possibly draw Kazimir Malevich – prophet of abstraction, liberator of Nothingness – to film, that mechanical preserver of "everyday trash" and life's "marketplace hubbub" (as he defined the use of this medium by the contemporary film makers) (Malevich, 2002, pp. 37, 44)? In 1924, Malevich described film as a system that "fixes reality outside artistic invention" (Malevich, 1976, p. 322), because, like science and religion, film relies upon concreteness of images and lacks vision: that is, film is powerless to show us the authentic, the essence whereas art is abstract (p. 366).

Nevertheless: While in 1918-24 Malevich published thirty-nine articles and a few brochures, the years from 1925 to his death in 1935 saw only four of his articles published in Russian journals, and there were four articles on film (I do not mention two further essays declined by the editors). These 4 texts became, paradoxically, the final statements of the artist deemed by the Soviet press as a reactionary and a mystic. Malevich challenges the very qualities of film that made this art an epitome of modernity for Futurists and Constructivists.

Remember Marinetti, cinema "born only a few years ago, may seem to be Futurist already, lacking a past and free from traditions", able to create a polyexpressive symphony most "adapted to the complex sensibility of a Futurist artist" (Marinetti *et al.*, 2009, p. 230). Russian Constructivists follow the same

logic: for them this mechanical apparatus, based on fragmentation, rupture, deconstruction and montage, was the ideal instrument for conveying the perception of modernity and speed, immensely vaster than the old arts.

Malevich however questions not only the usefulness of film's mimetic abilities but also its capacities to represent the dynamics and to renew perception. We may safely say that this mistrust of cinema did not stem from ignorance: Malevich was well acquainted with Sergei Eisenstein and Hans Richter, directors who were radically reforming the language of film. With Eisenstein he discussed his theory, for Richter he wrote a script for an "artistic scientific film" (Malevich, 2002, pp. 51-58).

Judging from his texts, Malevich often went to the movies as an ordinary viewer to see not only "artistic" or avant-garde films but also such popular hits as Mary Pickford melodramas (that he surprisingly liked), the comedies with Monty Banks, Igor Il'inskii, or Pat and Patachon (that he did not like).

In his essays he considers the dynamic development of the visual culture (including painting, posters, advertisement, photography, and film) in the framework of his own theory of the genesis of modernism as projected onto three problems: mimesis versus abstraction, statics versus dynamics, and visual perception in the age of optical instruments.

I will not discuss here the textual history and the cinematic debates in the Soviet press, which served as an impetus for Malevich's essays (what I did in the preface of the book: Malevich, 2002, pp. 9-29) but try to point to the problems that I did not discuss there:

1) the images of rubbery eroticism that are striking in Malevich's discussion of film;

2) the opposition of dead and alive, attributed to painting and film;

3) the connection of dynamics and perception and disconnection of mimesis and perception and the way how Malevich conceptualized it for film and painting;

4) Malevich's effort to elaborate a new language of description for visual and literary phenomena, to find the language that fixes the transition from visuality to literacy and vice versa.

2. First paradox: Rubbery Kisses

Let me start with eroticism. Malevich did not provide an answer to the obvious question (and left us the liberty of interpretation): why – protesting against the filmic trash and its rubbery eroticism – he was so addicted to moving images. In the recently published book on Malevich and film Margarita Typitsyn interpreted Malevich's interest as an escape from the prison of Modernism (Typitsyn, 2002). She did not explain this suggestion that implies a psychoanalytic approach to Malevich's attitude toward movies

which in this frame substitute a taboo and appear as a kind of repressed sexuality. Malevich is not so far from the psychoanalysis as we usually assume.

In his analysis of the contradictory development of modern art, he discussed the phenomenon of the log jam, the blockage, which hinders the development of a young artist (and of painting). Malevich saw himself as a doctor who strove to raise the blockage, curing the students from "painterly neurasthenia" (Malevich, .1998, pp. 330-331). But he did not apply this analysis on moving images since they lack the dynamics.

Art constructs elements and their relationships in space-time; in art, everything is futurized, everything is in motion; phenomena in all their facets are unfolded in time. In painting, this has been brilliantly resolved by Futurism, but film has failed to grasp it and busied itself with garbage. Cinema is a practical, convenient, cheap way of disseminating knowledge, wherein lies its usefulness and, perhaps, its purpose; but as far as it concerns the education of people in the field of artistic culture, film is a destructive phenomenon. It is behind [all arts] because its artistic form is obscured by garbage and kissing. Compared to the works of visual arts, it is not even worthy of criticism. It is a deaf and mute Lovelace, always drifting from one boudoir to the next[1] (Malevich, 2002, p. 65).

Cinema spins in a charmed circle of concreteness, having thoroughly convinced itself that the concrete can only be manifested in rubbery, pneumatic cine-kisses. And should someone dare to show a screen without kisses, society would label him a crazy utopian, an abstract-minded degenerate offspring of a concrete-minded society. The way out of this circle of concrete kisses lies through new art as a whole. Cinema will only reach a new dynamic-kinetic structure of film through new art forms, through pure abstraction, similar to that already reached by the painter.

Why this connotation? Malevich brings two things together: the (erotic) action and the material, rubber, or its various synonyms that Malevich used in Russian original: pneumatic and gutta-percha. His characteristic of film as a "deaf and mute Lovelace" and the image of artificial kisses are close, in wording and in concept, to Dziga Vertov's contemporaneous demand to get away from the "film factory of kisses and doves" (Vertov, 1998c, p. 151). On the other hand, film was described by several authors as a world of cheap substitutes imitating expensive authentic materials, cf. the analogy with calico, cheap cotton used to imitate leather, in Siegfried Kracauer's 1926 essay *Calico-World: The UFA City in Neubabelsberg* (Kracauer, 1995). The variety of rubber and gutta-percha, valued for its extreme elasticity, was commonly used for fabricating not only condoms (if we stay in the erotic context). The rubber was valued for its extreme elasticity and commonly used for fabricating masks, toys, and mannequins: thus, his image also

---

[1] Lovelace is a character in Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa, or the history of a young lady* (1748) denoting a philander.

evokes the world of rubber imitating live human body and, ultimately, points to the toy-like quality of cinema, the world of "toys" and "mechanical dolls" (Vertov, 1988b, p. 115). Kracauer made the same point: "This [i.e., film's] world is like a child's toy" (Kracauer, 1995, p. 281), and Vertov used the same comparison. The dolls were made at this time not only from rubber but mostly from celluloid, the thin, transparent and flexible material that was used for the film strip. The reference to the material for dolls and strips evokes the composed image of film. Malevich reproach the film to evoke the image of the false eroticism, the eroticism of inflatable dolls, of mannequins (like in René Claire's *Entre-acte*, 1924) that appears later by Vertov in the opening sequence of *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) where a series of mannequins from shop windows are presented. Film images and the dolls are made from the same material, their erotic and their concreteness are a fake. But at the same time "pneumatic" refers paradoxically to the incorporeal, ghostly life (i.e., incorporeal kisses) and to the air, breath, and spirit used in Russian as a synonym for animated (not only as animated cartoon, the immobile drawings brought to life, but also imbued with human soul).

We never discuss the relation of the avant-garde to the eroticism. But surprisingly Eisenstein's brief memoir of his acquaintance with Malevich, dated 1939, omits any mention of Suprematist theories, that they discuss; instead, Eisenstein conveys his vivid impression of the painter's physical strength and capacity for violence, relaying Malevich's anecdotes about the sexual pro(w)ess of donkeys, or about the village youths who had once beaten him up: in a gory act of vengeance, the creator of *Black Square* had broken their arms and knocked out their teeth (Eisenstein, 1997, pp. 310–312).

3. Second paradox: Dead vs. Alive

This idea about the failed eroticism and failed prowess in the movies is near to the opposition of dead and alive that is also a recurring motif in Malevich's texts. He describes the lens of the camera – both the film camera and photographic camera – as 'dead' in several essays. "I have never approved of or supported the dead mechanical mirror of the photographic lens" (Malevich, 2002, p. 59). Even more striking is his perception of the eye as a dead lens ("The eye-ball of every human being is a dead lens projecting on the mirror-negative of the brain": Malevich, 1998, p. 69), based on the assumption that only painting offers a different, live, system of vision. And *zhivopis'* in Russian refers to life and painting (to the painting of life). But Life as it is depicted in film has for Malevich an animal's face and "these faces are Victorious on the Screen" (so the title of one of his essays: Malevich, 2002, pp. 37-44). The faces are victorious everywhere. Look at the picture of the Art's exhibit from 1926 and Malevich's corner of the exhibit from 1915.

Malevich is offering us his next paradox: materialist consciousness is linked with abstract expression but the religious consciousness – with the realm of the images, pictures. He illustrates the difference between the two by phenomenon of Lenin's cult created after his death (Malevich, 1924). The artist in a materialist proletarian society is not an image-maker, not a painter of its sacred images or its daily tripe. You can convey the idea what Lenin or Dr. Mabuse (the great manipulator) were only by using (Malevich's) basic forms: square or circle, like on the cover of a film magazine *Kinonedelia* from January 21 of 1925 (the first anniversary of Lenin's death) or on the sketch (in oil on canvas) of a film poster for the Russian release of Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* that is often attributed to Malevich but is made by his pupil Il'ia Chashnik who transformed "e" in the name of Mabuse into "o", a black circle, a hole. In Malevich's paintings at this time the figures appeared faceless and with faces. His last pictures are portraits and self-portraits. In 1933, he represents himself as a Renaissance artist. Far away from his self-portrait from 1915 that consists of two squares, two rectangles, one trapeze and one circle.

This discrepancy is striking. I mean not only the individual development of the artist but the context. The discussions about the *filmic* qualities of moving images film at this time is based widely on a very popular discourse on photogénie and physiognomics where everything has a face (a landscape, an object, a crowd[2]). Malevich's aversion against "ideas containing" faces—mugs (Malevich, 2002, p. 44) — and the physiognomic discourse could be understood in the frame of his discussion of the basic quality of modern art: dynamics.

The movement of the body is always static whereas the kinetic qualities (so Malevich) are not connected to the bodily experience but to the visual perception detached from physiology and corporeality.

The discussion of kinetics in Malevich's writing on cinema confront us with the paradox number 3.

---

[2] The most prominent proponent of the physiognomic discourse was Béla Balázs. In his book *Der sichtbare Mensch* (1924), he declared the physiognomics of crowds, landscape, machines and faces in the close up to the essential substance of film following the tradition of Lavater, Goethe and Alexander von Humboldt (Balázs, 1982, pp. 35, 62, 207). The book appeared in Russia in two translations! In 1925, translated by Kirill Shutko, it was published in Moscow by Proletkul't under the title *Vidimyi chelovek. Ocherki dramaturgii fil'ma*. In Leningrad, the book appeared in 1926 as *Kul'tura kino* under the supervision of Adrian Piotrovski.

4. Third paradox: Cinema and Kinetics

Rhythm, from my point of view, is the art of combining repeated movements, and thus an ornamental form of motion. Painting cannot be ornamental because painting is, in its every single moment, a reproduction of this or that occurrence; it is a completed moment. Yet rhythmical movements, which draw an ornament are an incomplete (infinite) whole. Thus, in plastic or ornamental movement we observe a repetition of forms. Therefore, movement as such is missing, even though it is represented through the movement of the human figure or the dynamics of a painting. It follows that even in this non-pictorial rhythmic ornamental art, which resembles rather a colored sculpture in a live environment, we encounter the same law of artistic stasis (Malevich, 2002, p. 68).

Malevich does not subscribe to the prevalent conception of film as the latest stage in representation of motion: from Baroque painting to Impressionism, Futurism, and Constructivism, with its kinetic sculptures and installations; nor does he greet cinema as an *a priori* dynamic art.

"The Futurists," he writes, "despite the fact that motion is the content of their work, did not use cinema [a new technique of conveying dynamic sensations], nor did cinema call upon Futurism for its rejuvenation or liberation from romantic woes and passionate kisses" (ib.).

Dynamics can be understood in different ways. For Lev Kuleshov, the first Russian experimenter in film, dynamics and acceleration belong to the sphere of modernist machines: cars, airplanes, locomotives, steamboats, factories, electricity. In this conception, the human body can approach dynamics only by subjecting its movement to an artificial rhythm, inscribed in a geometrical scheme – in short, by becoming a machine – through sports, chases, and acrobatic leaps (Kuleshov, 1987, pp. 90-91).

Malevich excludes the human body from the catalogue of dynamic objects. In fact, he draws all his negative examples of misunderstood film-dynamics from slapstick comedy (Monty Banks, or the Russian comic Igor Il'inskii); that is, from the very sphere which theoreticians like Walter Benjamin have regarded as an arena for the development of these dynamics: through the collision of the body's movement and the camera's kinetics (Benjamin, 1996, p. 94). For Malevich, these two types of kinetics, mechanical and human, are too objectified to match the new dynamism, which is a "dynamic power" existing independently from objects, a movement "which our eye cannot catch, but which can be sensed" (Malevich, 1968, p. 88).

Malevich has an abstract notion of dynamics, built on the contrast with motion. In the text on film posters, he defines cinema as a "running" motionlessness; thus far, in his view, only painting had successfully conveyed real dynamics, the sensation of speed detached from corporeality.

Vision is not determined physiologically or psychologically; it is a product of culture, above all of painting. Suprematism creates new models of 'super'-vision, for abstract essences. His ideas of dynamic dynamism

outside of movement, dynamism as an invisible energy existing outside the body, clashed with rational analyses of movement as delivered through the film techniques.

In Russia, the discourse on the representation of motion in film was influenced by Henri Bergson as he was perceived by the Formalist circle, critics whose new analytical models drew from the literary practices of the Russian Futurists. Bergson uses film as a metaphor of human consciousness, which creates a model of the metaphysical sensation of movement that does not correspond to reality, and thus indicates the limitations of the concrete perceptive mechanism. For this reason, the Formalists consider cinema as an "art of conceptual motion": "Film is not a material reproduction of movement; it transmits an idea of movement" (Shklovskii, 1985, p. 32). Malevich supports this view and believes that motion is as illusory in film. Its image appears in the viewer's consciousness: "In reality, the pictures in film move only in the imagination of the spectator, and film manages to convey only a ghostly intention of movement" (Malevich, 2022, p. 47).

The Russian film avant-garde treated motion analytically; it was concerned not with the synthesis of motion, but with the realization of a gap, an interval, a moment of stasis between the photograms, which was realized both by Eisenstein, in his montage of statues and static objects, and by Vertov, who treated the interval as the organizing moment of film montage (Michelson, 1993).

Malevich, who outlines a rather metaphysical theory of motion as an optically imperceptible phenomenon, has noticed this strategy only in Vertov's case – and perhaps only because the frames recall the abstract paintings of the Futurist Giacomo Balla, which transmit not an illusion of movement, but a phantasmagorical sensation of speed.

Not by chance does Malevich illustrate his article on Vertov with a still from *The Man with the Movie Camera* and a reproduction of Balla's *Abstract Speed*, which he renames *Abstract Motion*.

(This painting by Balla was reproduced in *The Isms of Art* (1924) by El Lissitzky and Hans Arp, in which Malevich represented Suprematism, and Hans Richter absolute film). This is the dynamics invisible to the eye, which explodes the body and transcends mimesis. Films of Vertov and Walter Ruttmann (*The Man with the movie camera* and *Berlin Symphony of a Big City*) are juxtaposed in his text precisely on the basis of this principle. In Ruttmann's case, modernist objects are inscribed in a narrative scheme, proceeding from initial immobility to acceleration. For Vertov, motion is the quintessence of modernity: an equation of the motion of the object, the motion of film through the camera or projector, and the motion of the city. Film techniques themselves become, to use Malevich's terminology, an "additional element". The camera disintegrates motion, which is then recomposed as a cinematographic entity: compressed, extended, stopped, fragmented, multiplied in numerous exposures, in the superimposition of

multidirectional motion; the fragmented frame sets objects in motion differently than nature. Unsurprisingly, the term Malevich uses to describe this phenomenon is the Futurists shift.

The distinction between the external and internal dynamics was a part of specific Russian pre-revolutionary discourse on film (and post revolutionary connected to the specific idea of Eisenstein). The American film was dynamic (and in comparison to its dynamic the Russian film was static but developed the inner dynamics of psychological tension). Malevich transfers this tension on the other level and did not notice in his harsh criticism of Eisenstein that Eisenstein also elaborated the distinction between the illusory and the conceptual cinematic movement (Eisenstein, 1994). According to Malevich: Eisenstein is not an avant-garde artist but close to the traditional realist aesthetics. According to Eisenstein Malevich does not understand the fundamental principle of film: namely, that a shot does not exist as a unit of perception but is realized only through the dynamics of montage. In *The Fourth Dimension in Cinema*, Eisenstein claims that Malevich, for all his devotion to kinetics, remains a prisoner of immobility. His concept of dynamics is marked by the perspective of a painter – of an artist without access to the fourth dimension (Eisenstein, 1988, p. 191). Eisenstein built his self-vindication on his rejection of film's mimetic representation of motion — that is, the *illusory* motion of static photograms projected in rapid succession; what he created was a *concept* of motion, conveyed by the collision of static images. In these experiments, Eisenstein saw a liberation from the mimetic bonds of film. For him, a rupture in the illusion of motion intensified not only a different kind of kinetics but also semantics: the cinematic moments that form the film metaphor in analogy with verse, where the meaning is enhanced by the rhythm and the rhyme punctuating the break in the line. But the discussion regarding the illusory and the conceptual cinematic movement – hinging upon the distinction between the external and internal dynamics of the object so crucial for Malevich – is not taken up by Malevich. In his last article, Malevich responds indirectly to *The Fourth Dimension in Cinema* by disparaging Eisenstein's "village film," *The Old and the New* (1929), that shows "how pigs are fed on the state farm, or how the 'golden crops' are harvested." (Malevich, 2002, p. 82).

5. Perception in the age of optical instruments

The refinement of the illusion was, from Malevich's point of view, inessential. Art, in his neo-platonic conception, is not a recording or doubling of reality, but an instrument of super-vision: the vision and a super-vision is a product of culture and history, not a feat of optical technology. Only in this sense film – kinetic painting with light – can be integrated into the evolution of arts – from figuration to abstraction, from Cézanne, via Cubism and Futurism, to Suprematism. For Malevich, the ultimate meaning of this

process is not abandoning the imitation of nature but liberating thought from the bonds of developed categories and existing forms, including the mimetic dogma.

The image (including the film image) has been shaped by the technique of vision and representation of space, which had been developed by artists working since the Renaissance, and from which the masters of film cannot free themselves. Modern "metallic" culture – gramophone, radio, and film – alienates us from organic life: we deal only with imprints, which transform nature into an "abstract matter", revealing prefabricated essence of our perception.

Film directors, according to Malevich, are taught to see crudely; therefore, they reproduce in their pictures a mixture of different spatial systems and transform time into a spatial category: one shot of the landscape belongs to the year 1840; another, to the 1880s; a third, to the year 1925. It turns out that the protagonist of the film "runs through all time periods of an entire century" (Malevich, 2002, p. 46).[3]

Malevich demystifies the Constructivist approach to film and Vertov's concept of "cine-eye", which purports a new world vision enabled by new optical instruments, camera's mechanical vision. "Our starting point is: the use of the camera as a cine-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for examining the chaos of visual phenomena that fill the space. The cine-eye lives and moves in time and space, it perceives and fixes the impressions in a completely different way from that of the human eye" (Vertov, 1998a, p. 91). Malevich considers such a claim naïve, because the vision of the mechanical camera's eye is similarly informed by historical perception: "The cine-eye does not see anything new in nature; it looks at nature through the artistic eye of a painter and everywhere sees nature either through Polenov's eye or Perov's, through Monet's, or Rubens', etc. For now, cinema can see only the representation of phenomena seen by the painter" (Malevich, 2002, p. 46). The task of inventing a new system of vision cannot originate in the new apparatus, which is merely a technological means of recording; it must be refined in visual culture, whose aim lies in the transmission of a special vision, different from that of the eye. In this work art plays an auxiliary role. Like other new apparatuses, such as the gramophone, the photo camera, and the radio, film is still bound to the old art and its models of perception: painting and theater. Vision is formed by their standards and is a product of ideology, to the same extent as the technology of representation itself: "And for a survey of objectness, my eyes can be taken into a waxwork museum like attributes of the Middle Ages" (quoted after Douglas, 1980, p. 110).

Malevich's meditations on optical perception as stemming from culture, and not physiology, could be inscribed into the discussion about human senses and their conceptualization, which at the turn of the 20th century experienced several destabilizations. The return of the invisible – in the form of radioactivity,

---

[3] He refers to Iakov Protazanov's attempt to imitate light and shadow after the compositions of Perov and Makovskii in the comedy *The Tailor from Torzhok* (1925).

UV rays, radio waves, transmitted electrical signals – unsettled Western visual culture. The first technical media of preservation, photography, and gramophone, split the body and separated seeing and hearing. The rapid change from isolated senses - in silent films, gramophone records or broadcasting – to a multi-sensory experience in talkies emphasized the artificiality of the apparatuses' sensory system. This novelty refreshed confrontation of the oral and the visual, the physical and the symbolic, the subjective and the objective.

The avant-garde rehabilitated sensualism, magical orality, tactility, and synesthesia without being tied into linear narrative forms and mimesis. Cubism pulverized space and negated geometric perspective; a few years later, studies of perspective as an artificial figure of thought emerged (Florenskii, 1967; Panofsky, 1927; El Lissitzky, 1925). In arts and in the art theory haptic vision has been revived as a vivid experience instead of detached analytical seeing. Abstraction penetrated the mimetic pictorial and performative arts. Atonality, non-tempered sounds, sound poetry, simultaneity became the building blocks of a new poetics that attempted to undermine linearity and optical illusion. These experiments were projected onto two poles. Some have seen this as a return to archaic senses, the others as a materialization of the new electrical senses. The technical media turned the traditional order and coordination of the natural senses inside out (not the eye above the ear but vice versa) and caused a change in the perception of space and time.

Film images were as fleeting as sounds, vision acquired haptic qualities, space was experienced like a mosaic, and time could run backwards. At the same time, the new philosophical anthropology of Helmut Plessner (Plessner, 1923) or Jean Piaget's research on children's perception (Piaget, 1923; Piaget, 1926) explored the "natural" artificiality of the senses and conceptualized the senses as a product of culture. Malevich was unaware of these discussions, but he interpreted film as a way of seeing that was trained by painting. However, he classified the electrical senses and their mechanical imprints (photography, film, gramophone, radio) as dead senses – different to the alive painting. He reproduced the common dichotomy of the modern, seen as the opposition of the sensual culture and machine civilization. But he was convinced that a society striving to free itself from old symbols – a society developing a new body language, a new design of clothing and living spaces – needed new standards of perception as well.

6. Fourth paradox: Practical tests

Could the film script by Malevich produces this reorientation? The screenplay was written in Berlin after Malevich had seen German abstract films for the first time and met the director Hans Richter, whose works inspired him to write his own script for an abstract film. His selection of Hans Richter – whose experiments in abstract film had already been publicized in the first issue of Aleksei Gan's journal *Kino-*

Fot (Gilberseimer, 1922) – hardly seems accidental: in his *Rhythm 21* and *Rhythm 23*, Richter worked exclusively with black and white squares, in contrast with Viking Eggeling's diagonal "combs", or Ruttmann's round, organic shapes; that is, with the basic forms that Malevich saw as the expression of "Intuitive Reason".

In 1966 Hans Richter confessed: "I have completely forgotten about my film work with Malevich" (Richter, 1990, pp. 489-490). When the editor of Malevich's writing in Germany asked him what became of the film script, he couldn't even remember such a project. But after that he tried together with the documentary film maker and photographer Arnold Eagle to realize this script; the notes and film slips are at the Getty Research Library.

Malevich's script had to both popularize his theory of the evolution of visual culture and test the capabilities of film. It deals with the transformations of three basic forms – the square, the cross and the circle – first on a plane, and then in three-dimensional space. The motion of geometrical figures as a new form of "narrative" was pioneered by Malevich's colleagues in other media: the typographical, as El Lissitzky's *Tale of Two Squares*, and the performative, as the Suprematist ballet staged by Malevich's pupil, Nina Kogan in Vitebsk (Goriacheva, 1988). In the performance actors were concealed by geometrical figures painted on cardboard, which assumed various configurations (arcs, crosses, etc.) with their movements across the stage. These *tableaux vivants* intended to illustrate the principles of Suprematism, were based on the "narrative of the figures" emergence from the black square, their movement in space, and their subsequent transformation and return to the square[4].

Richter's *Rhythm* is constructed upon rhythmical compression of square forms and their disappearances in the illusory depth of the (screen) space. Richter, unlike Ruttmann, does not draw his film; he manipulates cut-out squares of different sizes on a black plane, which turns white when the film switches to negative. Ignoring light, he works with kinetics of surfaces and space. Malevich's appeal to Richter, however, can be seen as a misunderstanding. Richter's films are similar to the Gestalt psychologists' experiments with the perception of geometric forms. For Richter, film is a process of identifying objective functions of human perception, a peculiar mimesis of the functions of the sense-organs; for Malevich, film represents a liberation from such physiologically concrete, experienced functions.

In his script, Malevich privileges the image photographically closest to Suprematist painting. He presupposes an exit from two-dimensionality, not just into three-dimensionality, but also into the space of the real city, presenting Constructivist buildings and their subsequent amelioration by Suprematist architecture. The script breaks off in the sixteenth episode of the first part, which deals with "various

---

[4] Kogan's drawings for the ballet have been preserved in the Theater Museum of St. Petersburg.

sensual experiences of the surface" (Malevich, 2002, p. 52); the two remaining parts, "architectonics as a problem" and "architecture in life" are not elaborated.

Film for Malevich is not painterly or mimetic, because filmic space is three-dimensional – unlike two-dimensional stage space shaped by its façade (called in Russia "a mirror of the stage"). In spatial terms, film is closer to sculptural art, where light creates volume; like Suprematism, film is essentially architectonic. I suppose that was the clue why the film could never be realized and why the survived clips provoked a static and decorative effect.

Malevich's views will seem radical even to present-day readers. He opposes cinema, a "running motionlessness", to contemporary painting, the art of dynamics, invisible to the eye. The artist suggests a sensation of speed – but this sensation, like eyesight itself, is detached from the body. Vision is not determined physiologically or psychologically; it is a product of culture, above all of painting. Suprematism creates new models of *super*-vision for abstract essences. Film is a continuation of Suprematist painting, in another medium. Malevich demands film's subjection to the principles of painting; insofar as he finds affinities between the two forms, he accepts this new technology. Thus, despite his appeals to reject easel painting, addressed to directors and filmmakers, Malevich remains in his understanding of cinema first and foremost a painter.

7. Last paradox: The language of description

Malevich tried to develop a new language of description that could fit the visual and literary field. The poets and the painters work closely together producing texts as pictures like Vasily Kamensky's poems or Alexei Kruchenykh's painted books. I cannot analyze his whole dictionary with new invented terms as "impenetrable surface" as opposed to "pulverization" and "transparency", law of contrasts, shift, additional element etc. and the metaphors that he used: painter as weaver, comparable with Vertov's comparison of a film maker with a cobbler. Let me show what I mean with two examples.

We normally detach Malevich from Marxism and psychoanalysis. But looking at his verbal choice we can discover the proximity. For example, Malevich's theory of the additional element. The term itself appears to be borrowed from Marx. Malevich originally used the term *dopolnitel'nyi*, supplementary, later amended to *pribavochnyi*, additional; the Russian *pribavochnyi* has the added connotation of surplus, as in *pribavochnaia stoimost'*: surplus value. But Malevich himself referred the term to the field of "psychobacteriology", presenting it as a kind of microbe but draws from the Freudian realm: the additional element – usually in his understanding dynamics – alters the established order in the connection between the conscious and the unconscious during artistic activity, restructuring the perception, reflexes of motion (even the

motion of an artist's hand), artistic world of the painter, and destroying the norm of representation (Malevich, 1976, pp. 147-195). Also his izology (the science that should study the genesis and evolution of modern arts[5]) would concern itself with deviations from the "norm" that occur in the "organism" of the painter or in the "body" of a work of art, and the fluid interconnection between the conscious and the subconscious; and kinology (the same for the film) brings to mind another contemporary coinage, "pedology": a science studying ways and methods of influencing the child's psyche, which was actively developed by Soviet psychologists in the 1920s under a strong impact of psychoanalysis.

8. Transition from Visuality to Literacy

The elaboration of one language for the verbal and pictorial expressions shows the connection to the new autonomous language of Modernity and the new systems of their recording like zaum poetic of Russian futurists. "Zaum" (normally translated as transrational language) is shaped by the re-contextualization of word and image. The grammar is destroyed, and the poets tried to create some other form of recording the sound using the graphic means of expression. Letter should be exchanged through the icons and the new spatial integration of letters and words – against the linearity of scripture and the time-line – should be found. In the books, on the posters, in the film intertitles and in the cities. They think not only about the deconstruction of words but also the deconstruction of their presentation. At this time, Eisenstein develops a pictorial grammar of film thinking that the images could transmit the abstract concepts; and Malevich's pupil El Lissitzky looks for a new system of recording of sound and letter and suggests a new Topography of Typology, optics instead of phonetics (El Lissitzky, 1967, p. 359). It is interesting that Jacobson mentioned in his memoirs that he discussed with Malevich the new system of notation and Malevich examined in the section of phonology in GINKHUk later in the 1920's exactly on the same problem (Jacobson, 1999, p. 39).

---

[5] See Malevich's series of articles for the Ukrainian journal *Nova generaciia,* republished in the Russian edition of his writings (Malevich, 1998, pp. 129-271).

Bibliography

Balázs, B., 1982, *Der sichtbare Mensch oder die Kultur des Films*, in Id., *Schriften zum Film*, vol. 1, ed. by Diederichs, H., H. *et al.*, Berlin, Henschel, pp. 45-143.

Benjamin, W., 1996, *The Formula in Which the Dialectical Structure of Film Finds Expression*, in Id*., Selected Writings*, vol. 3, ed. by Bullock, M. C., Jennings, M., W., Cambridge (Mass.), Belknap Press of Harvard UP, pp. 94-95.

Douglas, C., 1980, *Swans of Other Worlds: Kazimir Malevich and the Origins of Abstraction in Russia*, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor.

Eisenstein, S., 1988, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, in Id., *Writings 1922–1934*, ed. by Taylor, R., London, BFI Indiana University Press.

Eisenstein, S., 1994, *Imitation as Mastery: Lecture at La Sarraz Conference on Independent Film*, in Christie, I., Taylor, R., (eds.), *Inside the Film Factory*, London, Routledge, pp. 66-71.

Eisenstein, S., 1997, *Memuary*, vol. 2, ed. by Kleiman, N., Korshunova, V., Moscow, Redaktsiia gazety "Trud": Muzei kino.

Florenskii, P., 1967, *Obratnaia perspektiva* (1922), in "Trudy po znakovym sistemam", 3, pp. 381-416.

Gilberseimer, L., 1922, *Dinamicheskaia zhivopis'*, in "Kino-Fot"*,* 1, p. 7.

Goriacheva, T., 1998, *Teatral'naia kotseptsiia UNOVISa na fone sovremennoi stsenografii*, in Katovich, T., Pankov, N. A. (eds.), *Malevich, Klassicheskii avangard, Vitebsk - 2: Sbornik materialov tret'ei mezhdunarodnoi teoreticheskoi konferentsii*, Vitebsk, pp. 45-57.

Jacobson, R., 1999, *Meine futuristischen Jahre*, Berlin, Friedenauer Presse.

Kracauer, S., 1995, *Calico-World: The UFA City in Neubabelsberg*, in Id., *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essay*, translation in English and ed. by Levin, T. Y., Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, pp. 281-288.

Kuleshov, L., 1987, *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh, tom 1: Theoria: Kritika: Pedagogika*, ed. by Khokhlova, A. *et al.,* Moscow, Iskusstvo.

Lissitzky, El, 1925, *K. und Pangeometrie*, in Einstein, C., Westheim, P. (eds.), *Europa-Almanach*, Potsdam, Gustav Kiepenheuer, pp. 103-113.

Lissitzky, El, 1967, *Life, Letters, Texts*, ed. by Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, London, Thames and Hudson.

Malevich, K, 1968, *Essays on Art: 1928–1933*, vol. 2, ed. by Troels Andersen, Copenhagen, Borgen.

Malevich, K., 1924, *Lenin*, in "Kunstblatt", 10, 1924, pp. 289-93.

Malevich, K., 1976, *The World as Non-Objectivity*, in *Unpublished Writings, 1922–1925*, vol. 3, ed. by Troels Andersen, Borgen, Copenhagen.

Malevich, K.., 1998, *Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh, Tom 2, Stat'i, teoretichenskie sochineniia, opublikovannye v Germanii, Pol'she i na Ukraine*, ed. Galina Demosfenova, Hileia, Moscow.

Malevich, K., 2002, *The White Rectangle: Writings on Film*, ed. by O. Bulgakowa, Berlin and San Francisco, PotemkinPress.

Marinetti, F. T. *et al.*, 2009, *The Futurist Cinema*, in Rainey, L. *et al.* (eds.), *Futurism: An Antology*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, pp. 229-233.

Michelson, A., 1993, *The Wings of Hypothesis: On Montage and the Theory of the Interval*, in Teitelbaum, M. (eds.), *Montage and Modern Life*, Cambridge (Mass.), The MIT Press, pp. 60-81.

Muza, A., 2002, *Weaving Texts: A Note on Malevich's Use of Language*, in Malevich, K. *The White Rectangle*: *Writings on Film*, ed. by Bulgakowa, O., Berlin and San Francisco, PotemkinPress, pp. 86–91.

Panofsky, E., 1927, *Perspektive als ,symbolische Form'*, in Saxl, F. (eds.), *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1924-5*, Leipzig and Berlin, Teubner, pp. 258-330.

Piaget, J., 1923, *Le langage et la pensée chez l'enfant*, Neuchâtel and Paris, Delachaux et Niestlé.

Piaget, J., 1926, *La représentation du monde chez l'enfant*, Paris, F. Alcan.

Plessner, H., 1923, *Die Einheit der Sinne. Grundlinien einer Aesthesiologie des Geiste*s, Bonn, F. Cohen.

Richter, H., 1990, *Köpfe und Hinterköpfe* (1966), in Mierau, F (eds.), *Russen in Berlin: Literatur, Malerei, Theater, Film, 1918-1933*, Leipzig, Reclam-Verlag, pp. 489–90.

Shklovskii, V., 1985, *Semantika kino* (1925), in Id., *Za 60 let,* ed. by Levin, E., Moscow, Iskusstvo, pp. 30-32.

Tupitsyn, M., 2002, *Malevich and Film,* New Heaven, Yale University Press.

Vertov, D., 1988b, *Factory of Facts* (1926), in Taylor, R., Christie, I. (eds.), *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896–1939*, London and New York, Routledge, pp. 150–151.

Vertov, D., 1988c, *Film, Fiction, Drama, and the Cine-Eye: A Speech given at the ARK, 9 June 1924*, in Taylor, R., Christie, I. (eds.), *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896–1939*, London and New York, Routledge, pp. 115-116.

Vertov, D., 1998a, *The Cine-Eyes. A Revolution* (1922), in Taylor, R., Christie, I. (eds.), *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896–1939*, London and New York, Routledge, pp. 89-94.